

The First Century
of the
Cleveland
Foundation

1914—2014

By
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OF THE CLEVELAND
FOUNDATION

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BY

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The
Cleveland
Trust Company

Trustee of the Cleveland Foundation

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(Colonel Ayres was asked by the Chairman to imagine himself as speaking in the year 2014, and looking backward from that time, to review the first hundred years' activities of the Cleveland Foundation, organized in 1914—Editor's note)

WE CELEBRATE tonight the one-hundredth anniversary of the establishment of the Cleveland Foundation. The year is 2014 and we look backward over the span of a century to the year 1914 when the Foundation came into existence. That year is a memorable date. For the nations of the world it marked the outbreak of the Great European War with its heritage of death, destruction and poverty. For the city of Cleveland and for American cities in general it marked the inception of the community foundation, resulting in a series of benefits and blessings to mankind, tremendously impressive in their ultimate outcome.

Just a century ago the President of the Cleveland Trust Company organized the Cleveland Foundation and dedicated it to the task of carrying forward civic progress

and human welfare in this city. The purpose of this Foundation was to utilize gifts and bequests from citizens who wished to devote their accumulated property to making their fellow citizens and their posterity healthier, happier, and more worthy.

This was the first local foundation or community trust organized in America, but so rapidly did the idea commend itself to far-seeing men in other cities that within the first half-dozen years fifty other American communities had established similar organizations, and within the first quarter of a century every important American city had followed their example. *(The Cleveland Foundation)*

This new form of benefaction combined advantages that had not previously been united in any other foundation, trust fund, or endowment. It was a plan by means of which a man might make sure that his property would be wisely administered after his death, his widow supported through her lifetime, his children educated and started on the road to productive adult usefulness, and finally that his resources would be devoted to the general public welfare of the city in which he had lived and worked.

The funds left to the Foundation under these provisions were invested and cared for by the Cleveland Trust Company. Their income was administered by a board of five trustees who shaped the policies of the Foundation, and by an employed director and assistants who carried these policies into execution. The trustees were men and women of Cleveland interested in welfare work and familiar with the civic, educational, moral, and physical needs of the community. Their powers were both broad and flexible. The whole plan combined with stability of organization a true democracy of spirit and method, for in the last analysis the Foundation derived its powers from the people and, through the composition of its board of Trustees, it has ever been responsible to the community for its acts.

Surveys in the Early Years In the first years of its existence the Cleveland Foundation conducted surveys of civic conditions in such fields as those of charitable relief, public education, organized recreation, and the like. These careful studies of community problems and needs were activities looking

far into the future. During the early years when the income of the Foundation was meagre, its Trustees were preparing for those years to come when they would have large sums to expend. Perhaps no fact testifies more eloquently to the deep wisdom of the founder than that through his guidance the early efforts of the organization were directed toward studying thoroughly the needs of the city to secure a solid fact-basis for thinking and acting in that later time when the Foundation would have large sums to devote to the improvement of social and living conditions in the city of Cleveland.

Before the first quarter of a century had elapsed it was generally realized throughout America that the President of the Cleveland Trust Company had made the most important single contribution of his generation to the art of wise giving and that the community foundation had become a most potent influence to turn the minds of men from an absorption that is selfish to a service that is social.

In the year 1920 there met in the city of Bangor a convention of bankers, and in his

opening remarks the chairman described the typical American banker as an old man sitting in a darkened room with his feet in a bucket of ice-water saying, "No." It is clear that the organizer of the Cleveland Foundation was not that kind of banker.

Art of Giving Developed During the first 25 years the trustees of the Foundation made new advances in the art of giving until they were able to help the city without destroying public initiative. In part they learned by mistakes that had been made in such places as Greenwich, Connecticut, and Fairhaven, Massachusetts, where unwise benefaction had shown that it is as easy to pauperize a community as a person. These errors were avoided in Cleveland.

As the years passed the Cleveland Foundation retained its original policy of continuously securing complete and accurate information about the city and its problems. Through its Director and his assistants it gradually secured, and always kept up-to-date, reliable knowledge about the city and its citizens. It did this with the object of making Cleveland a more livable home for

the people residing there and of making it easier for the citizens to develop into wiser and worthier people.

Relatively early in its existence the Foundation was instrumental in following up the education and recreation surveys, which it had conducted as its first enterprises, until the city became famous as the home of the most progressive school system in all the land. As the culmination of this it ultimately brought about the unification of the city's higher institutions of learning into a great and harmonious University of Cleveland.

Higher Community Ideals Progressively the trustees followed the policy of working towards ideals a little higher than the people were prepared to accept, and of modifying and advancing these ideals as each step in progress was attained. They followed the program of leadership recently laid down by the President of the College of William and Mary in Virginia when he said: "You start the people where they want to go, and then you lead them where they drive you."

As the intellectual and educational centers of the city became well established and able

to carry themselves forward, the trustees found themselves confronted with the problems of increased revenues and changed public needs. At this juncture they began to turn their attention to the unlimited improvement of the city itself as a place to live in. By means of gathering information, molding public opinion, giving conditional grants, and steadfastly carrying on researches they grappled with first one and then another of the city's problems.

One of the first, and perhaps the most difficult, of these campaigns was the fight against the smoke evil. This was finally successful and by the middle of the century the city became a faultlessly clean community—a modern spotless town on a grand scale. It is now hoped that when all the buildings of the group plan are completed they will look as clean and spotless in reality as they originally did in the architect's drawings.

City Improvements Secured The next great effort was devoted to the streets of the town and it was carried through against greater opposition than any of the other reforms that

have been accomplished. Ultimately it brought about permanent, smooth, and durable pavements in every street in the city as well as continuous and level sidewalks. Moreover, while the transition was under way, the trolley wires were taken down and put underground.

Another important reform consisted in the reclamation by Cleveland's citizens of the magnificent lake front with which Nature has endowed the locality. The Lake Shore Boulevard was extended in both directions for a total distance of more than thirty miles so that in this city by the lake the citizens finally had free access to the pure air and beautiful vistas that the lake affords. This reform encountered great opposition from the corporations owning factories and wealthy citizens owning residences who had early pre-empted for their own use this most desirable portion of the city's area. Moreover it had to overcome sentimental objections of a serious sort for, in the course of its construction, the new boulevard was carried right through the grounds belonging to the residence of the very man who had organized the Foundation and brought it into existence!

Time does not permit us to review in detail the many other reforms that the Foundation has been instrumental in initiating and carrying through. After the city had been rendered clean and well paved, reforms were carried through against unnecessary noise, and the city became quiet as well as beautiful. The park system was extended and ramified, the outlying suburbs were brought under the same municipal government as the city itself. Throughout the community the citizens were encouraged, and even compelled, to erect their places of business and their dwellings in conformity to the best standards of American architecture and city planning, and to maintain them in constant repair and cleanliness. The city became beautified as well as clean and quiet.

The Arts Brought to the People Music was fostered and the advantages of the Art Museum were carried to the people, as those of the Public Library have long been made available, through a system of branches. The historical records of the community were carefully conserved through the efforts of the Foundation.

Finally, as the culmination of its first century of endeavor the Foundation has succeeded in bringing about a reform for which it has striven the longest and which the citizens of the city have almost universally regarded as being hopeless and impossible of attainment. It has finally brought together all the warring factions; it has secured a common agreement as to plans; it has secured the plot and it has laid the cornerstone for the new Union Station!

As we look back tonight over its century of attainment our thoughts turn to the author of it all, the President of the Cleveland Trust Company, who organized the Cleveland Foundation in 1914. He worked for those whom he never saw and never could see in the hope that he might aid in making the lives of his fellow citizens better and brighter. He toiled in the advance and built for future. He cut the trail that progressive humanity has broadened into a highroad.